COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 24, 2007

RANCHO LA VINA BANK RESTORATION PROJECT

File No. 07-019
Project Manager: Janet Diehl /Carol Arnold

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $89,500 to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County to restore a portion of the Santa Ynez River bank and floodplain terrace on the Rancho La Vina property in Santa Barbara County.

LOCATION: Rancho La Vina property, on the Santa Ynez River, 10 miles downstream from Highway 101 and Buellton, County of Santa Barbara (Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Photographs

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

Exhibit 4: Mitigated Negative Declaration

Exhibit 5: Notice of Determination

Exhibit 6: Department of Fish and Game Scope of Work

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed eighty-nine thousand five hundred dollars ($89,500) to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (Land Trust) to restore stream bank and floodplain habitat on the Rancho La Vina property along the Santa Ynez River. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the Land Trust shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
2. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to carry out the project have been obtained.

3. Evidence that the Land Trust will acknowledge the participation of the Conservancy on any signs, flyers or other types of written materials that describe the Rancho La Vina Bank Restoration project.
4. Documentation that the Land Trust has obtained written authorization from the owners of the Rancho La Vina property to undertake the work and has entered into an agreement sufficient to protect the public interest in the property.
5. The Land Trust shall implement or cause to be implemented the applicable requirements of the Programmatic Mitigated Negative Declaration (Exhibit 4: Appendix B) adopted on June 7, 2006 by the California Department of Fish and Game under the California Environmental Quality Act for the 2006 Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, and the supplemental mitigation measures identified in the Scope of Work (Exhibit 6: Scope of Work)."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 6 (regarding resource enhancement) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Santa Ynez River is identified as a significant environmental resource in Santa Barbara County's certified Local Coastal Program, requiring public action to resolve existing and potential resource problems.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Programmatic Mitigated Negative Declaration for the 2006 Fisheries Restoration Grant Program and the Department of Fish & Game Scope of Work incorporating specific mitigation measures for this project as shown in the following exhibits to the accompanying staff recommendation: Exhibit 4, Mitigated Negative Declaration & Appendix B; Exhibit 5, Notice of Determination; and Exhibit 6, Scope of Work. The Conservancy finds that the project as designed avoids, reduces, or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, may have a significant adverse effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations, Section 15382.
4. The Land Trust is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project will result in improved water quality and steelhead habitat by stabilizing 1,500 feet of bank and restoring the riparian canopy on a section of the Santa Ynez River, approximately 23 miles east of where the river joins the Pacific Ocean in Santa Barbara County. The project will be accomplished by planting at least 25 willow baffles and approximately 2,000 native trees and

shrubs, in conjunction with other actions to stabilize the riverbank and floodplain terrace and increase habitat diversity for the endangered southern steelhead and other fish and wildlife species.

The work will be performed on the Rancho La Vina, a privately owned agricultural property containing 20 acres of cropland currently used for vegetable, dry bean and flower seed production (Exhibit 2: Photographs). The landowners have entered into access agreements with Land Trust to allow the work to take place, and have agreed to maintain restored vegetation to comply with the success criteria as outlined in permit requirements.

The river's left bank on the property has been subject to extensive erosion. In recent years, approximately seven acres of viable farmland have eroded away, resulting in the release of over 336,000 cubic yards of sediment into the river and eliminating a 20-foot wide riparian buffer between the bank and the cropland. With no root systems stabilizing the bank, the river continues to migrate and erode. As a result, a depositional bar approximately 700 feet wide has formed directly across from the eroded bank on the property. This obstruction confines the river's flow, which further erodes the banks.

The Santa Ynez River contains one of the largest runs of the endangered southern steelhead trout in Southern California, but sedimentation from destabilized river banks and other sources has greatly impacted the fish and other aquatic species. In recent years, the run has declined to only several hundred fish. This project will enhance water quality and steelhead habitat by stabilizing the river banks and restoring riparian vegetation on both the bank and adjacent floodplain terrace.

The project will require a temporary diversion of the river, and the removal of native fish to suitable habitat upstream. After these preparatory measures are completed, the following tasks will be performed:

1. Reconfiguration of the bank slope using material from the gravel bar;
2. Creation of terraces in the bank slope and planting of willows;
3. Broadcasting native seed on the bank and covering with erosion control fabric; and
4. Planting native trees and shrubs along the top of slope and floodplain terrace.

The Land Trust will oversee the project in cooperation with the Department of Fish and Game, which is providing over two-thirds of the funding. The California Conservation Corps will provide most of the labor. The Land Trust has extensive experience in protecting and enhancing habitat in Santa Barbara County, including preserving and managing restoration projects on about 14,000 acres of natural resource and open space lands. The Land Trust is particularly qualified to undertake this project due to its long history of working with private landowners.

Site Description:

The Santa Ynez River flows west from its headwaters in the San Rafael Mountains in Los Padres National Forest for 90 miles where it empties into the Pacific Ocean just below Lompoc, Santa Barbara County. It drains a nearly 900 square mile watershed bounded on the south by the Santa Ynez Mountains, on the north and east by the Purisima Hills and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. The river supplies three reservoirs, including Cachuma Lake, which is the major water source for southern Santa Barbara County. Although the Santa Ynez is one of the largest rivers

on California's central coast, its flow is highly variable. Often nearly dry in the summer, the river can be a raging torrent in the winter and spring.

The river flows through mountainous terrain until reaching the Santa Ynez River Valley, where it meanders through open space, ranch and cropland. The Rancho la Vina Property is located in this area. The cropland on the property is 20-acres in size, producing vegetables, dry beans and flower seeds. Subject to periodic flooding, the river has cut a steep bank at this location which is now devoid of vegetation, making it particularly vulnerable to erosion.

The watershed is home to a diverse array of plant and animal species, including at least 22 that are threatened or endangered. These include four plant species, two fish species, three reptile or amphibian species, and 13 bird species. Of these, the California southern steelhead is of most concern, having declined from many thousands to only several hundred fish in the last fifty years.

Project History: For many years, the survival of southern steelhead in the Santa Ynez River has been in question. Declines in this species have been largely due to dams and water diversions for agriculture and domestic supplies. Finally, in the early 1990s, the State Water Resources Control Board began evaluating the operation and management of the river's water diversion structures and other measures. This set in motion a process that resulted in the October 2000 Lower Santa Ynez River Fish Management Plan (Plan) to identify measures to improve conditions for steelhead. The Plan was developed by a technical advisory committee under the guidance of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Fish and Game.

The Plan focused on the river downstream of Bradbury Dam on Cachuma Lake; this portion of the river currently has the most important steelhead habitat in the river. The Plan recommended several actions to benefit steelhead. These were: (1) creating new habitat; (2) improving habitat conditions; (3) improving access to important spawning and rearing habitat, and (4) increasing public awareness and support for beneficial actions on private land.

The Cachuma Conservation Release Board, the agency responsible for management of Cachuma Lake, took the lead in carrying out several projects recommended in the Plan. The source of funds for those projects was a $750,000 appropriation to the Conservancy's FY 2000/01 budget for salmonid habitat enhancement.

The current project is another step in implementing improvements to this river system to help restore the once-abundant native steelhead population, a priority Conservancy goal. The Department of Fish and Game has taken an active interest in this project, and has committed a total of $264,604 in funds toward implementation.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	$ 89,500
Department of Fish and Game	264,604
Conservation Corps	15,120
National Ocean Atmospheric Administration	20,000
Landowner	14,300
Total Project Cost	**$403,524**

The source of funds for the proposed project is expected to be the Conservancy's FY 05/06 appropriation from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50), which can be used for coastal watershed protection and restoration consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. This project will improve water quality and habitat for the endangered southern steelhead and other fish and wildlife species within the Santa Ynez River watershed by stabilizing a portion of river bank and restoring riparian vegetation on the bank and floodplain terrace. The project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation as described below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31251-31270, to address resource enhancement in the coastal watershed of the Santa Ynez River.

Pursuant to Section 31251, the Conservancy may award grants for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of natural or human-induced events, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values. This project will improve habitat for southern steelhead, an endangered species that is an important coastal resource. The project, along with others in the Santa Ynez River watershed, may ultimately lead to an increase in the southern steelhead's numbers and distribution.

Consistent with Section 31251.2, the Conservancy may award grants to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside the coastal zone, in order to enhance coastal resources within the coastal zone. The southern steelhead is an anadromous fish which utilizes the Santa Ynez River both within and outside the coastal zone.

Consistent with Section 31252, Santa Barbara County has a certified Local Coastal Program that contains policies the address the need to protect and enhance the Santa Ynez River, its watershed, and the wetlands and the river's mouth. Specifically, these policies encourage the County to "pursue funding for specific studies to determine the effect on wildlife and habitat of various land use activities and to determine allowable levels and kinds of uses as well as appropriate mitigation measures" within the watershed (policy 3.9.5.5c) and to work with public agencies to "encourage and support wetland restoration projects where feasible" (policy 3.9.5.9) at the mouth of the Santa Ynez River.

Pursuant to Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective A**, the proposed project will result in the restoration of approximately 1,500 linear feet of destabilized bank on the Santa Ynez River, and a 20-foot-wide riparian zone between the river and agricultural land.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective B**, the proposed project will restore riparian habitat that will serve as a wildlife corridor along the river.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective A**, the proposed project will improve habitat for anadromous fish within the Santa Ynez River watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective B**, the proposed project will improve water quality by stabilizing a riverbank and reducing sedimentation in the river.

Consistent with **Goal 7 Objective B** the proposed project will help reduce impacts of agricultural operations on fish and wildlife habitat and water quality by helping to prevent agricultural run-off from entering the river.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project has the support of Assemblyman Pedro Nava and Senator Tom McClintock as well as several public agencies, environmental groups, and individuals, including the California Department of Fish & Game, the Tri-County Fish Team, the Cachuma Resource Conservation District, the owner of Rancho La Vina and NOAA. (Exhibit 3: Letters of Support).
4. **Location:** Although the proposed project lies outside of the coastal zone, it is within the Santa Ynez River watershed, which lies partly outside, and partly inside, the coastal zone. The watershed provides critical habitat for the anadromous southern steelhead, a federally listed endangered species which uses the coastal region for spawning and migration.
5. **Need:** Although the Land Trust has raised significant funds for this project, there is a need for Conservancy monies to help close the funding gap. Without such funding the project could not go forward.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The lower Santa Ynez River watershed, including the area where this project is located, has been designated critical habitat for the federal endangered southern steelhead. This project would improve habitat for a species whose significance extends well beyond the immediate project area.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The steelhead population in the Santa Ynez River has dwindled to a run of probably less than 200 fish. Nevertheless, this may be one of the largest remaining populations of southern steelhead. Without the Conservancy's support, improvements to steelhead habitat that may assist in the recovery of the species are likely to be delayed or not be undertaken at all.

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will result in improved water quality and expanded riparian habitat, while providing benefits to agriculture by reducing the threat of erosion.

9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

10. **Conflict resolution:** The project helps reduce conflicts between the needs of agriculture and the requirements of southern steelhead and other fish and wildlife species.

11. **Readiness:** The Land Trust, in conjunction with the Department of Fish and Game, has completed all planning work and is ready to move ahead.

12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."

13. **Cooperation:** This project is a cooperative effort of the Land Trust, the Department of Fish and Game, the California Conservation Corps, the landowner, and several federal agencies. It is part of a larger endeavor to restore the once abundant native southern steelhead to this river system.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

Although out of the coastal zone, this project is consistent with the certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) of Santa Barbara County. Section 3.9.2 of the LCP describes environmentally sensitive habitat areas as including areas in which plant or animal life or their habitats are rare or especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an ecosystem. Section 3.9.2 specifically identifies as environmentally sensitive "rare and endangered species habitats" and "specialized wildlife habitats which are vital to species survival." Such habitats are to be preserved and protected. Improvement of habitat for the endangered southern steelhead is the goal of this project.

Section 3.3.4 of the LCP notes that watersheds "have the potential for impacts on coastal streams, wetlands, [and] estuaries," and states the protection of watersheds is necessary to "insure continued biological productivity of coastal streams and wetlands." Thus, although the specific project area of this recommendation is not in the coastal zone, the project is consistent

with LCP policies calling for protection of entire watersheds because of their hydrologic and biologic links to coastal zone resources.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

In order to implement projects to improve fish spawning and rearing habitats through its statewide Fisheries Restoration Grant Program (FRGP), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) developed a Programmatic Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for all of its 2006 FRGP funded projects of which this project is a part. The MND identified impacts to biological and water quality elements of the environment related to project construction. The MND addresses all of the anticipated environmental effects of the funded projects by providing mitigation measures for the various types of projects that would be implemented throughout the state. This includes standard protocols for avoiding impacts to species of concern, including state and federally-listed threatened and endangered species. (Exhibit 4: Programmatic Mitigated Negative Declaration).

DFG approved the Rancho La Vina project for funding and included it in the 2006 MND. After approving the project, DFG prepared a contract with the Land Trust, incorporating the key mitigation measures in the Scope of Work (Exhibit 6: Department of Fish & Game Scope of Work). These are described as follows:

> Work in flowing streams is restricted to June 15 and October 31. Actual project start and end dates, within this timeframe, are at the discretion of the Department of Fish & Game. Planting of tree seedlings shall take place after December 1 or when sufficient rainfall has occurred to ensure the best chance of survival of the seedlings. The standard for success is 80% survival of plantings, after a period of three years.
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> The Land Trust shall notify the DFG Project Manager a minimum of five working days before any fish bearing stream reaches are dewatered and the stream flow diverted. The notification shall provide a reasonable time for Department personnel to supervise the implementation of the water diversion plan and oversee the safe removal and relocation of salmonids and other aquatic species from the project area. If the project requires dewatering of the site, and the relocation of salmonids, the Land Trust shall implement the following measures to minimize harm and mortality to listed salmonids:
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> > Fish relocation and dewatering activities shall only occur between June 15 and October 31 of each year.
> >
> > The Land Trust shall minimize the amount of wetted stream channel dewatered at each individual project site to the fullest extent possible.

> All electrofishing shall be performed by a qualified fisheries biologist and conducted according to the National Marine Fisheries Service, *Guidelines for Electrofishing Waters Containing Salmonids Listed under the Endangered Species Act*, June 2000.
>
> The Land Trust shall provide fish relocation data to DFG's Project Manager on a form provided by the Department of Fish and Game
>
> Additional measures to minimize injury and mortality of salmonids during fish relocation and dewatering activities shall be implemented as described in Park IX, pages 52 and 53 of the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*.

In addition to the above mitigation measures described in the Scope of Work, Appendix B of the MND describes general mitigation measures applicable to all projects funded under the FRGP. It contains numerous measures to reduce or avoid impacts to fish and wildlife, including those that are endangered, rare, and/or threatened. It also contains measures to reduce or avoid impacts on cultural, geological and hydrological resources and water quality. General mitigation measures that relate to the Ranch La Vina project are described below:

> The MND requires timing of work to avoid impacts to biological resources, including restricting fish relocation and dewatering of streams to the period between June 15 and November 1, or the first rainfall; restricting the period for upslope work to roughly the same period; conducting surveys to determine presence of nesting or breeding birds or terrestrial animals and a further restricting of the construction timing as necessary to avoid impacts; regular removal of trash from the construction site to avoid attracting predators; adherence to work site best management practices to assure equipment and materials do not harm the environment; adherence to policies forbidding the spread or introduction of invasive exotic plants; demarcation of the work area to assure that access routes, staging areas, and the total area of disturbance is kept at a minimum; requiring that any work within the stream channel will be performed in isolation of the flowing stream; work site surveys for endangered, rare or threatened plant species prior to any ground-disturbing activities, and institution of protective measures, if necessary, as prescribed under DFG guidelines. If it becomes impossible to implement the project at a work site without potentially significant impacts to rare plants, then activity at that site will be discontinued.
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> Additional mitigation measures relating specifically to protection of anadromous salmonids include: requiring fish screen on intakes for dewatering pipes; restoring disturbed banks upon completion of construction; leaving large wood removed from fish passage barriers within the riparian zone; and minimizing the amount of wetted stream channel that is dewatered. If it becomes impossible to implement the project at a work site without potentially significant impacts to anadromous salmonids, then activity at that site will be discontinued.
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> Additional mitigation measures relating specifically to protection of California Red-Legged Frog (CRLF) include: surveying the site for CRLF prior to construction and removing any CRLF that are found; training construction personnel on CRLF protection measures; having a DFG-approved biologist onsite during removal of CRLF, worker training, and habitat disturbance activities; fueling and maintaining vehicles at least 65 feet from riparian habitat or a water body; requiring frog screens on dewatering intake

pipes; limiting ground-disturbing activities in potential CRLF habitat to between July 1 and October 15; and permanently removing any exotic species such as bullfrogs, centrarchid fishes or non-native crayfish from the project area.

Additional mitigation measures relating specifically to the Arroyo Toad include: retention of a biologist familiar with the species to monitor construction activities; dissemination of information to all personnel working on the project related to requirements for protecting the species; on site meeting with U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFWS) staff and biologist; surveying to determine possible location of fencing to protect habitat; fencing if necessary; limiting activities to times of year when dispersal has occurred; removal of species if necessary; placement in suitable habitat if necessary; location of staging areas for construction equipment outside of stream channel; complying with requirements of Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force; drift fence/pit trap surveys as necessary; conducting repair activities after August 15 and before February in riparian areas; and restricting work to daylight hours.

Additional mitigation measures relating specifically to the Willow Flycatcher include: no heavy equipment within one quarter mile of any site with known or potential habitat until after August 31 or after September 15, depending on sub-species; no harvesting of willow branches with known or potential habitat between May 1 and August 31 or May 1 and September 15, depending on the subspecies; potential modification of individual work sites if surveys determine no nesting birds within one quarter mile during breeding season; limitation of willow harvesting to no more than one-third of individual plant; inspection of work before, during and after by Department of Fish and Game; and discontinuance of work if these measures cannot be implemented or actions cannot be modified to avoid impacts.

Ground disturbance in the Rancho La Vina project is not expected to result in effects to cultural resources and no mitigation measures are included. However, the Land Trust and DFG will report any previously unknown historic or archaeological remains discovered at the site to the appropriate agencies and will comply with approved avoidance procedures. In order to avoid significant impacts to geology and soils, bare soil will be seeded, mulched and planted as necessary using best management practices and soil will be compacted to the extent necessary to reduce any surface erosion that may occur with the first heavy rainfall. Potential impacts from release of hazardous materials associated with heavy equipment operation will be avoided through use of standard measures detailed in DFG's adopted Mitigation Measures, Monitoring and Reporting Program. The Land Trust and DFG's Contract Managers will inspect the work site before, during, and after completion of the work action to ensure that all necessary mitigation measures to avoid impacts are properly implemented. DFG's adopted Mitigation Measures, Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project is included as Appendix B of Exhibit 4.

DFG found that all potentially significant impacts associated with the funded projects, including the Rancho La Vina project, would be avoided or mitigated below a level of significance under CEQA. A Notice of Completion was submitted to the State Clearinghouse on April 17, 2007 and copies of the MND were submitted to relevant parties. It was also noticed in the Santa Barbara News Press and Ventura County Star and was available for review in several DFG offices in the area. No public comments were received**.** DFG approved the MND and filed a Notice of Determination on June 7, 2006 (Exhibit 5).

Upon its independent review of the MND and Scope of Work, staff found that no additional mitigation measures for this project would be required. Staff concurs with the DFG finding and recommends that the Conservancy find that the Rancho La Vina Bank Restoration project, as mitigated, does not have a potential for a significant effect on the environment as defined under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382. Upon approval, staff will file a notice of determination.